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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA ON TRACK FOR 2008 SCHENGEN ACCESSION

¶11. (SBU) Despite some early uncertainty and delays carried over from the previous government, the current GOS seems motivated - and able - to meet its deadlines for joining Europe's Schengen zone by the end of the calendar year. Accession to the Schengen zone would, in effect, certify that Slovak border controls are up to the same standards as and compatible with the other countries party to the Schengen treaty. On Monday, February 20, Slovak border authorities showed off the first major upgrade to Slovakia's eastern frontier with Ukraine, including a Chinese side-scan radar that can easily detect smuggled goods and people hidden inside vehicles. Personnel will also be steadily increased, from 650 to 900 border guards by the end of the year.

GOVERNMENT FINALIZES CONTRACTS...

¶12. (U) Eager for international approval and well aware of U.S. scrutiny of their border controls as part of the visa waiver roadmap, the Slovak government signed a EURO 28.8 million contract in December with Swedish company Ericsson to install sensors and cameras along the mountainous, 68 mile eastern border with Ukraine. GOS officials are quick to point out that the same Ericsson technology currently secures the Norwegian-Russian border. In addition, special vehicles will be purchased to provide physical security enhancements along the border, long considered a weak link to any Schengen expansion. Ericsson expects the upgrades to be completed by summer 2007.

UPGRADES: SO FAR, SO GOOD

¶13. (U) Slovakia closed its Vysne Nemecke border with Ukraine to cars and pedestrian traffic February 19, while installing technical upgrades including a Chinese made side-scan radar capable of providing detailed images of cars and trucks crossing the border. Upgrades are expected to be completed by mid May. In addition, the Ministry of Interior plans to meet its goals to raise the number of border guards patrolling the eastern frontier with dogs and night vision goggles from 650 to 700 by June, and to 900 by the end of **¶2008.**

WORKING LEVEL CONTACTS FULLY CONFIDENT

¶14. (SBU) MOI sources say that an additional five or six months will be required to install a command and control center in the town of Sobrance to monitor the new electronic surveillance system, which will include monitoring of the two road, two rail, and one pedestrian crossings to Ukraine. In meetings with U.S. and other western diplomats, Slovak border professionals have been fully confident that they will meet all Schengen requirements and become full members of the Schengen zone by January 1, 2008. Senior

political officials - including the Deputy Minister of the Interior responsible for Schengen implementation - say that Slovakia has "given its word" to its EU neighbors that all requirements will be met. Even privately, long-term contacts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Customs Office, and Ministry of the Interior - assuaged by the recent contracts and GOS resolve at the political level - have voiced no serious concerns over Slovakia's accession.

HOW THE U.S. IS HELPING

¶5. (SBU) To help Slovakia accomplish these goals, the USG has provided:

-Training for border police and customs inspectors through EXBS, including everything from English language instruction, to technical expertise, investigation and border patrol techniques, consultations, and even a visit by Navajo trackers;

-Equipment for border police and customs inspectors, including X-Ray vans to search for contraband or dangerous cargoes in different kinds of luggage and car parts, and vehicles for border patrol purposes;

-Installment of DOE portal monitors to enhance Customs' capability to effectively screen pedestrians, vehicles and rail traffic for radioactive materials, in conjunction with other border upgrades.

In addition, PAS plans to highlight U.S. contributions to Slovakia meeting its high-priority goal of Schengen accession in border events with the Ambassador and relevant ministers.

CONSULAR IMPLICATIONS

¶6. (SBU) From a Consular perspective, Schengen accession will have little influence on NIV processing at Embassy Bratislava. It will,

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however, demonstrate an increased security posture which Slovakia will likely highlight as part of its attempts to join the visa waiver program. Most illegal immigrants in Slovakia are attempting to travel west to France, Germany, and Italy, and very few third country nationals (TCNs) apply at Embassy Bratislava. Still, the expansion of the Schengen frontier will even further limit the incidence of unqualified TCN applicants at the Embassy's consular section.

VALLEE